

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Hook 'N Ladder-Royale, 4/29/52. New comedy by Charles Horner and Henry Miles, directed and produced by Al Moritz. Vicki Cummings, Allen Nourse and Judson Pratt featured...The Male Animal-City Center, 4/30/52. New York City Theatre Company opens spring season with limited run production of Thurber-Nugent comedy. Michael Gordon directed, cast stars Elliott Nugent, Robert Preston and Martha Scott...Much Ado About Nothing-Music Box, 5/1/52. Luther Greene and Jerry Tishman present Shakespeare comedy directed by Anthony Eustrel. Cast includes Claire Luce, Melville Cooper and Mr. Eustrel...The Victim-President, 5/2/52. David Heilweill and Robert N. Winter-Berger present new comedy by Leonard Lesley, based on Saul Bellow novel. George Auerbach directed, cast includes Lloyd Gough and Anne Negira. Postponed from previous week.

Digests of Current Reviews - late review back page

Candida-National, 4/22/52. Unanimous panning leveled against Olivia de Havilland's second bout with the local critics. Shaw revival presented by Thomas Hammond, and directed by Herman Shumlin, found scant words of praise for any department. Most critics amazed that Shaw wit could seem so dull and dreary when poorly acted. Terrance Kilburn, as Marchbanks, shared major blame with star for bad acting, while Ron Randall's Morell fared better. Many praised movie actress beauty and stubbornness to act, but they didn't think these made up for her lack of talent. Chapman, News, and Sheaffer, Eagle, noted that when she relaxed she was much better. Atkinson, Times, found even sets and costumes too dreary. Coleman, Mirror, liked Bramwell Fletcher. Most agreed that entire cast took script too seriously. Play is scheduled for a four week limited run in N.Y.C.

The Chase-Playhouse, 4/15/52. Weekly reviewers generally agree that Jose Ferrer's missed in trying to land three hits on 48th Street this season. Horton Foote's melodrama, starring John Hodiak and Kim Hunter, as produced and directed by Ferrer lacked his usual sense of good showmanship. Script couldn't make up its mind if it wanted to be Western thriller or a psychological melodrama. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, praised production for skillfully combining melodramatic action and thoughtful character observation. But he was the only one. Trade paper reporters said Ferrer could be excused for this one, but thought script might make good material for either little theatres (Billboard) or movies (Variety). Gabriel, Cue, defended daily critics against radio commentators who said first nighters had missed point. But he doubts if message alone makes for an exciting evening. Gibbs, New Yorker, didn't think prose ever rose above Zane Grey level.

Four Saints in Three Acts-Broadway, 4/16/52-4/26/52. ANTA limited run production of Thomson-Stein opera, appearing in N.Y.C. prior to European tour, won as controversial a set of reviews from weekly appraisers as it did from their daily colleagues. Bron, Variety, okayed it only if taken as gentle nonsense, otherwise it is for the birds. Francis, Billboard, still wonders what Stein gibberish is about, though music and settings were lovely. While Gabriel, Cue, once again enjoyed piece's rare pomp, grave wit and tantalizing beauty. Other weekly magazine drama critics passed the decisions to the music departments of their magazines. Watt, New Yorker, rated it as a sublime minstrel show stating that lyrics and music are of equal importance in unique entertainment.

' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I. Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

CALL ME MADAM-10-12-50	PROS: 27	CON: WB WN WWR
THE FOURPOSTER-10-24-51	PROS: 19	CON: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY NONE: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GIGI-11-24-51	PROS: 18	CON: DT DM DC DP DW WWM BL WCU WNR WSR WT NONE: BC
GUYS AND DOLLS-11-24-50	PROS: 29	CON: WN
I AM A CAMERA-11-28-51	PROS: 22	CON: DN DJ WCM WNR WN SO-SO: DT
THE KING AND I-3-29-51	PROS: 29	CON: WN
THE MOON IS BLUE-3-8-51	PROS: 26	CON: WCD WGN NONE: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2-20-52	PROS: 20	CON: DJ BC DL WNR WT WGN DM NONE: WNR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11-10-51	PROS: 21	CON: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC NONE: BL WWR WSR
PAL JOEY-1-3-52	PROS: 28	CON: BL NONE: WWR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12-13-51	PROS: 25	CON: DW BL WN WNR WT
THE SHRIKE-1-15-52	PROS: 25	CON: DW WCD WGN BE WN
SOUTH PACIFIC-4-7-49	PROS: 29	CON: WT
STALAG 17-5-8-51	PROS: 22	CON: DM WCD BL WCU WNY SO-SO: DW
TOP BANANA-11-1-51	PROS: 23	CON: DP DJ BL NONE: WCM WW WWR WSR
THREE WISHES FOR JAMIE-3-21-52	PROS: 18	CON: DP DJ WCU WT BC WCM WSR NONE: WWM WN WWR MP

' Off Broadway '

Hudson Playhouse, rechristened Theatre de Lys, after its new owner, to open in fall with Percy Mackaye's The Scarecrow...Everyman's Theatre presented Time to Remember at Amato Opera Theatre...Provincetown Repertory presented Powers Moulton's new version of The Rivals at Provincetown Playhouse...American Theatre Wing's Community Plays presented My Name Is Legion at Park Sheraton...Friday night readings presented by Morris Carnovsky and Howard da Silva at Yugoslav American Hall...Dramatists' Forum Workshop presents Robert Hadley's The Patchwork Heart at Amato Opera Theatre April 29 and 30...New Dramatists Workshop presented Otis Bigelow's The Lion and the Unicorn at Palm Garden...Wadeeha Attyeh presented her one woman show "Songs and Song Stories of Arabia" at Provincetown Playhouse...Punch Opera to run nine week summer season in Greenwich Village, starting with Vaughn Williams' Hugh the Drover...Amateur Comedy Club presenting Dear Barbarians..."Saroyan Circus" production of three short plays by William Saroyan at Amato Opera Theatre panned by Pollock, Compass, as poorly done.

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' Green Room Department '
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CRITICS TO STAY...Drama reviewers lack perspective and experience for their jobs, Barrett Clark, Dramatists Play Service, charged on WNBC Critic at Large, when he subbed for Leon Pearson. Last season critics condemned several adult, entertaining plays because they failed to view them in the proper spirit. Four Twelves Are 48 and Curious Savage were among those inadequately reported. Both have proved successful in little theatres around the country. Usual charges fired at critics are nonsense, because it is the reader who continues to buy and read the critics that give the reviewers power, Clark explained. Proper solution to train better qualified critics might be a college course in reviewing and theatre background, but Clark was stumped as to who might give such a course.

BESTS & WORSTS...George Jean Nathan's annual lists of "Georgies" for 1951-52 season include: Don Juan in Hell as best play, I Am A Camera as Best American Play; no new musical wins award as best. Best set by Eldon Elder for Legend for Lovers, and best actress Julie Harris. Worst play, bar none, was Collector's Item, worst musical a tie between Bagels and Yox and Borscht Capades. Worst performances by Donald Murphy in Dear Barbarians and Gloria Swanson in Nina.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Council of Living Theatre should support efforts like N.Y.C. theatre junket sponsored by Columbus, Ohio Citizen, suggests Burr, Playbill... Hollywood actors should come back to the theatre to fulfill their obligations to their art, urges Coleman, Mirror...Good idea to keep the Drama Critics Circle Constitution permanently lost, states Watts, Post...Critics should award just one prize yearly to make the citation more meaningful, says Chapman, News.

TV VS. BROADWAY...Results of first week's "Broadway TV Theatre," WOR-TV New York's experiment showing same full length play five nights, prove that its future will depend entirely on the plays picked. Production and acting was marked as fair by most of critics, while all noted that 25 year old Trial of Mary Dugan was ragged. Routine was Van Horne, WT&S, verdict, while Gould, Times, got a real sense of theatre going, trade paper reviewers Bril, Variety, and Bundy, Billboard, didn't think it fair to judge series on dated script.

MAIL BOX...Brooklyn Eagle reviewer Louis SHEAFFER surprised that Variety, after calling up to find out how to spell his name, proceeded to misspell it...Another Times reader votes for early matinees, but thinks 2:00 P.M. would be early enough.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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Shows that closed include Jane, The Grass Harp, Flight Into Egypt, Venus Observed and Golden Boy...Gigi and The Moon Is Blue accepting telephone reservations... Olivia de Havilland and Lester Cowan, motion picture producer of Main Street to Broadway, guests of Drama Desk...Outer Circle picked Point of No Return as best play of season...National Theatre box office robbed of \$250...Yale University Dramatic Association presenting adaptation of The Birds by Walter Kerr...Louis Simon named director of American Theatre Wing's Professional Training Program...Barter Theatre Award auditions held April 28th at ANTA...Columbia University's Brander Matthews Dramatic Museum celebrating 100th anniversary of founder's birth with Shakespeare exhibit...Howard University's Channing Pollock Theatre Collection opens May 4th...Nation review on The Grass Harp was by Joseph Wood Krutch, not Margaret Marshall, magazine corrects...International Conference on Theatre and Youth in Paris recommended steps by governments to develop children's theatres...Off Broadway shows that continue include An Evening of Bohemian Theatre at Cherry Lane, The Restless Flame at Blackfriars Guild.

' Random Drama Notes '

FILMS....Don Juan in Hell production may be filmed in England next year...Julius Caesar film, produced by David Bradley, released in 16 mm form from Brandon Films... Jose Ferrer plans to produce film of 45 Minutes from Broadway...Keefe Brasselle will play lead role in MGM "The Eddie Cantor Story"...Gilbert and Sullivan musical biography being filmed in London with Robert Morley, Maurice Evans and Martyn Green in leading roles..."Main Street to Broadway" film sponsored by Council of Living Theatre and produced by Lester Cowan to start production in May...Fox to make film biography of Sol Hurok entitled Tonight We Sing...George Sanders has been assigned the Paul Lukas role in 20th Century Fox production of Call Me Madam...MGM bidding for screen rights to Sylvester, News, next novel "Indian Summer" reports Kilgallen...Candida producer Thomas Hammond to film production in England next year...An advertising agency is complaining to N.Y. News, Billboard reports, that daily is devoting ten times as much space to theatre as it does to films.

RECORDS....Harvard University has issued long playing set of Moliere's School for Wives as produced by Louis Jouvet in March 1951 in Boston...Capitol Records to make original cast albums of Of Thee I Sing and Casey Jones, musical due next fall...Caedmon Publishers, releasing long playing records featuring readings by Dylan Thomas, Laurence Olivier and Thomas Mann...Santly Joy to record two songs from New Faces of 1952...Don Juan in Hell recording for Columbia done in studio, not in theatre with audience as originally planned...Show albums have been pushed off best selling lists recently with only Columbia's South Pacific in the running.

TV & RADIO...Top Banana considering one shot closed circuit TV telecast...NBC planning "London Palladium" radio show with Ben Lyon as MC...London's Old Vic making half hour TV films of Shakespeare scenes...Theatre Guild planning once a month TV drama...Washington, D.C. outdoor drama Faith of Our Fathers to be televised serially over 13 week period...Perry Awards and Drama Critics Circle awards were both broadcast on radio this year...National Repertory Theatre TV show would give young actors a chance to star in plays with famous actors in supporting roles, says O'Brian, Journal American...WNBC Leon Pearson to report on U.S. theatre abroad on NBC Critic At Large...Columns Newsreel on WNBC, includes excerpts from reviews of new plays...Radio adaptations of Best Plays of Year, compiled by Chapman, News, will be presented Sundays on NBC with Chapman as narrator...Summer series based on High Button Shoes being considered for TV...Future Celanese Theatre productions on ABC-TV include They Knew What They Wanted and The Distaff Side...Future Broadway TV theatre productions on WOR TV include Angel in the Pawnshop, Three Men on a Horse and Angel Street...WNYC Shakespeare Festival runs May 3 thru May 10.

' Late Reviews '

To Be Continued-Booth, 4/23/52. Sole "favorable" review on William Marchant's new comedy produced and directed by Guthrie McClintic was filed by Sheaffer, Eagle. If playgoer doesn't expect play to maintain its early sparkle, Sheaffer thought, he will have an entertaining time. Others noted that new playwright composed a farcical situation and some funny lines but script turned into a dud when author became serious. Excellent cast headed by Dorothy Stickney, Louella Gear and Jean Dixon, and attractive Donald Oenslager sets were wasted. Most backed Watts, Post, opinion that this was another example of actors and producer in search of a play. Hawkins, WT&S, blamed playwright for not making his point. Kerr, Herald Tribune, insisted sophisticated theme needed wit of Shaw or Wilde. Chapman, News, marked it off as a dull sex comedy.

